

the anthracite and bituminous regions. Under the strong competition which has existed in the bituminous trade, operators claim that the profits have been extremely small, and that the imposition of the tax will compel a number of small mines to close down. The anthracite companies also claim that the industry is in no position to stand any additional burden. It remains to be seen what influences are the stronger at Harrisburg.

BITUMINOUS.

The seaboard soft coal trade is quiet. Demand is less active than it has been, but deliveries continue to be made at satisfactory prices. At a few points which suffered most from the winter shortage demand is brisk, especially as it is seen that nothing in the way of reduced prices is to be gained by waiting.

Contracts seem to be a more important feature of the trade in New England than in New York and the West, and many of the largest consumers in the East are already receiving heavy tonnage on the new season's orders. This forehandedness is prompted by the recollection of their experience of last winter. Contract prices remain steadily at the level of last year, and if any change occurs it will be towards a higher level, particularly on New River and Pocahontas coals. In New York the tendency to take advantage of contract arrangements does not appear to be strong.

Heavy all-rail shipments to the West blocked many of the through lines, to the detriment of other kinds of traffic. To improve this condition the general managers have agreed to embargo shipments from eastern mines until the congestion is relieved, with a promise to refund demurrage charges in plain cases of delay in transportation.

Trade in the far East is vigorous, owing to the depletion of winter stocks.

Birmingham. March 27.

The coal production in Alabama is holding its own, even among the furnace companies' mines which are being operated with non-union labor. The blowing in of more coke ovens at Pratt City and elsewhere in this State indicates that the coal output is more satisfactory. Considerable coke is still being imported from West Virginia.

Repairs are being made in the Virginia mine, which belongs to the Alabama Steel & Wire Co., and in a few days all traces of the explosion which took place on Feb. 20 will have been removed. The mine will be started up again just as soon as a new force of men can be collected. The coroner's jury is still at work, with a decision looked for by next Saturday. Three suits for damages have been brought so far against the Alabama Steel & Wire Co., each being for \$20,000. Just as soon as coal can be gotten from this mine, the coke ovens will be started up. This coke is used in the Gadsden furnace.

The Tennessee Coal, Iron & Railroad Co. is making extensive repairs on the coal mines near Wylam, in the western part of Jefferson county. New haulage systems are being installed. A new shaft is being sunk near by.

State Mine Inspector J. M. Gray and his two assistants, James Hillhouse and M. Kuffner, are making a close examination of all mines in the State, especially in regard to coal dust. Assistant Inspector James Hillhouse recently went through the Flat Top mines, in the western part of Jefferson county, where 154 State convicts are worked, besides a large number of county convicts, and he found that short

fuses were being used, and mining rules not strictly carried out. Coal dust was also reported and the operators were instructed to sprinkle the mine and take out an accumulation of dust. The corrections asked for by the assistant inspector have been made. The mining laws in Alabama are to be enforced to the letter and all indications point to some radical amendments.

The annual meeting of the Alabama district organization of the United Mine Workers of America, has been called by President Ed. Flynn, to meet in Birmingham, June 8. The election of officers will be the first business. The strike, which began last July and is still on, will probably be discussed, after which the wage scale for the coming year, beginning July 1, will be taken up.

Chicago. March 27.

Speaking in general terms, the coal market is very weak. Bituminous has reached its old depression level with the continuance of mild weather and the absence of reasonable hopes for a change due to the weather. The evils of the situation are so apparent, that two or three schemes are afoot reducing the supply, or at least regulating production to the varying needs of the market. That too much coal is being produced at Indiana and Illinois mines is generally admitted, but the difficulties of restricting production have been so great, through the great number of mines and the constant opening of new mines, that it has been impossible to bring about any concerted action. It is possible, however, in the opinion of experienced men, to bring about a healthier state of the trade by an arrangement for preventing the accumulation of coal on track, with consequent demoralization of the market, by diverting shipments, and something of this kind is likely to be put into effect before many weeks.

The anthracite trade is now certain about its 1905 prices, which will be the same as last year according to announcements—\$6.50 base price for the year, with a 50c. discount for April and a graduated discount by 10c. steps each month up to full price in September. This makes the retail price in Chicago \$7.25 for April and \$7.75 for September and the winter months. These prices have been anticipated and orders have been somewhat freely taken by wholesalers for April. The volume of trade, however, is not satisfactory and anticipations are expressed that the year will be a repetition of last year in bunching the greater part of the trade in the latter part of the year—the very thing the graduated system of discounts was intended to prevent. Judging from experience, this system has not brought about the results hoped for.

Western bituminous is 15@25c. off from the prices of a week ago on fine coals, and 10@20c. off on the better grades. Eastern coals are about the same, with no sort in great demand and a prospect that a very low market will result from accumulation on track of almost any grade.

Cleveland. March 28.

Lake coal prices are in an unsettled state due to the failure of M. A. Hanna & Co. and the Pittsburg Coal Co. to come to an understanding on terms. The two were in an agreement which lasted five years, and which has just expired. The failure to renew this contract brought about a slash in price on the part of Hanna & Co., who quoted $\frac{3}{4}$ in steam coal at \$2.10 f. o. b. Lake Erie ports. This was a considerable

reduction from the price made a year ago. The Pittsburg Coal Co. has not put in its price so far. This controversy may make impossible any agreement as to coal prices for the current year, and it will be a go-as-you-please proposition. The market has been rather feeble. The lake coal carrying rates have been fixed, although the vessel-owners are not making any extensive contracts. Only one vessel firm has made any contracts. That concern took season coal at 35c. to the head of the lakes and 45c. to Lake Michigan.

The steam coal situation in this territory has not changed. The demand is slightly improved. The market has been about steady at \$1 at mines for run-of-mine steam coal from Ohio and Pennsylvania mines. There has been a good demand for slack at 60@65c. at mine, for both Ohio and Pennsylvania coal.

The coke situation is strong. This is partly due to the influence of one big concern which practically controls the situation, and also to the fact that the ovens have not been able to overcome a falling behind early in the year. The prices hold at \$3 for standard 72-hour coke at oven; \$2.50@\$2.60 at oven for furnace coke.

Pittsburg. March 28.

Coal.—Both the miners and operators are interested in the bill before the Pennsylvania legislature putting a tax of 3c. a ton on all coal mined in this State. It is being bitterly opposed, and delegations of operators and officers of the United Mine Workers have been in Harrisburg for several days fighting the bill. If the proposed measure becomes a law it will undoubtedly result in a reduction in the mining rate, in order to enable the Pennsylvania bituminous coal operators to compete with other States, and may be the means of dissolving the Inter-State agreement and seriously disturbing conditions in the four mining States that are parties to the agreement. The wage scale in the Pittsburg district is fixed for the year beginning April 1, as a two-year agreement was entered into last year, but the scales for the central field, the Mercer-Butler and several smaller districts are yet to be adjusted, and all are held up pending action on the proposed bill. It was stated to-day that if the measure is not killed it may be modified, and apply only to anthracite coal, as there is no competition in that field.

The railroad mines in the Pittsburg district are not active this week, but will be in a few weeks, when the lake shipments begin. All the river mines are in operation, and will be operated steadily for some time. The flood of last week left an excellent boating stage, and shipments to southern ports will continue for several days; besides, a large number of empty coal boats and barges are being returned. So far about 6,000,000 bush. have been sent out, and as much more will go out before the end of the week. Prices remain about the same, on a basis of \$1@ \$1.10 for run-of-mine coal at the mine.

Connellsville Coke.—Furnace coke is quoted at \$2.25@\$2.40; foundry at \$2.75@\$3, and contracts are being made at those rates for second half delivery. Higher prices, however, are expected to rule shortly. The production for the week is given at 262,188 tons, and the shipments aggregated 12,789 cars, distributed as follows: To Pittsburg and river points, 4,810 cars; to points west of Pittsburg, 6,515 cars; to points east of Everson, 1,464 cars. This was a gain of 326 cars compared with the previous week.